
8. Some of the staunchest enemies of slavery believed the time had not yet come for women's rights and pressured Sarah and Angelina to desist from the cause, fearing it would split the cause of abolition. How do you think the sisters should have responded to their demand? At the end of the novel, Sarah asks, "Was it ever right to sacrifice one's truth for expedience?"

9. What are some of the examples of Handful's wit and sense of irony, and how do they help her cope with the burdens of slavery?

10. Contrast Handful's relationship with her mother with the relationship between Sarah and the elder Mary Grimke. How are the two younger women formed-and malformed-by their mothers?

11. Kidd portrays an array of male characters in the novel: Sarah's father; Sarah's brother, Thomas; Theodore Weld; Denmark Vesey; Goodis Grimke, Israel Morris, Burke Williams. Some of them are men of their time, some are ahead of their time. Which of these male characters did you find most compelling? What positive and negative roles did they play in Sarah and Handful's evolvment?

12. How has your understanding of slavery been changed by reading *The Invention of Wings*? What did you learn about it that you didn't know before?

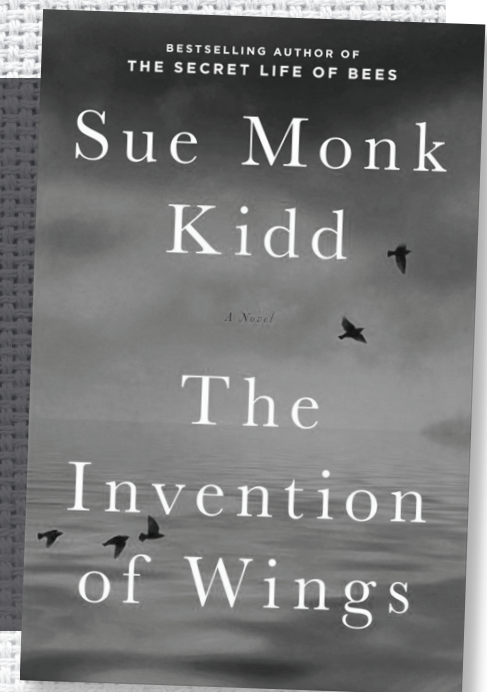
13. Sarah believed she could not have a vocation and marriage, both. Do you think she made the right decision in turning down Israel's proposal? How does her situation compare with Angelina's marriage to Theodore? In what ways are women today still asking the question of whether they can have it all?

14. How does the spirit tree function in Handful's life? What do you think of the rituals and meanings surrounding it?

15. Had you heard of the Denmark Vesey slave plot before reading this novel? Were you aware of the extent that slaves resisted? Why do you think the myth of the happy, compliant slave endured? What were some of the more inventive or cunning ways that Charlotte, Handful, and other characters rebelled and subverted the system?

Discussion Questions

"Bond proves to be a powerful literary force, a writer whose unflinching yet lyrical prose is reminiscent of Toni Morrison's."
- *O, The Oprah Magazine*



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Sue Monk Kidd's first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, spent more than one hundred weeks on the New York Times bestseller list, has sold more than four million copies, and was chosen as the 2004 Book Sense Paperback Book of the Year and Good Morning America's "Read This!" Book Club pick. She is also the author of several acclaimed memoirs and the recipient of numerous awards, including a Poets & Writers award. She lives near Charleston, South Carolina.

Book Summary

Writing at the height of her narrative and imaginative gifts, Sue Monk Kidd presents a masterpiece of hope, daring, the quest for freedom, and the desire to have a voice in the world—and it is now the newest Oprah's Book Club 2.0 selection.

Hetty "Handful" Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke's daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women.

Kidd's sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah's eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other's destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, estrangement and the uneasy ways of love.

As the stories build to a riveting climax, Handful will endure loss and sorrow, finding courage and a sense of self in the process. Sarah will experience crushed hopes, betrayal, unrequited love, and ostracism before leaving Charleston to find her place alongside her fearless younger sister, Angelina, as one of the early pioneers in the abolition and women's rights movements.

Inspired by the historical figure of Sarah Grimke, Kidd goes beyond the record to flesh out the rich interior lives of all of her characters, both real and invented, including Handful's cunning mother, Charlotte, who courts danger in her search for something better.

This exquisitely written novel is a triumph of storytelling that looks with unswerving eyes at a devastating wound in American history, through women whose struggles for liberation, empowerment, and expression will leave no reader unmoved. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

1. The title *The Invention of Wings* was one of the first inspirations that came to Sue Monk Kidd as she began the novel. Why is the title an apt one for Kidd's novel? What are some of the ways that the author uses the imagery and symbolism of birds, wings, and flight?
2. What were the qualities in Handful that you most admired? As you read the novel, could you imagine yourself in her situation? How did Handful continue her relentless pursuit of self and freedom in the face of such a brutal system?
3. After laying aside her aspirations to become a lawyer, Sarah remarks that the Graveyard of Failed Hopes is "an all-female establishment." What makes her say so? What was your experience of reading Kidd's portrayal of women's lives in the nineteenth century?
4. In what ways does Sarah struggle against the dictates of her family, society, and religion? Can you relate to her need to break away from the life she had in order to create a new and unknown life? What sort of risk and courage does this call for?
5. The story of *The Invention of Wings* includes a number of physical objects that have a special significance for the characters: Sarah's fleur-de-lis button, Charlotte's story quilt, the rabbit-head cane that Handful receives from Goodis, and the spirit tree. Choose one or more of these objects and discuss their significance in the novel.
6. Were you aware of the role that Sarah and Angelina Grimke played in abolition and women's rights? Have women's achievements in history been lost or overlooked? What do you think it takes to be a reformer today?
7. How would you describe Sarah and Angelina's unusual bond? Do you think either one of them could have accomplished what they did on their own? Have you known women who experienced this sort of relationship as sisters?